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# CONVERSATION GUIDE

The conversation  
about your leadership  
development

# The conversation about your leadership development

**T**he conversation about your development as a leader is important. It's a 'must' for growth. Because even though you are personally responsible for this, you won't get there alone. Enlisting the help of other people will take you further. Don't be afraid or shy about taking the space you need to bring up personal themes. Your loved ones and your supervisors are there to provide support and you should expect that support. In the same way that you should expect to invest valuable time and energy in yourself. It starts with you. You've taken the first step, your interest is piqued and you've been forced to think. Now for action. That includes starting the conversation. And I would like to give you a few tips to support you with this.

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## HOW DO I GO ABOUT IT?

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Some key things I want to share with you are about how you can create the space to talk about your leadership development at work.

- Set up a weekly or biweekly meeting with your supervisor, with your development on the agenda. Your supervisor is partly responsible for your development, so your conversations should not just be about the content of your work.
- Make sure the conversations lead to concrete actions that you will work on. These can be 'thinking' or 'doing' tasks. As long as you keep it small and agree on a goal or focus, so you can reflect on this together next time.

*Examples are: initiate a 360-degree feedback so that you can use that input in the follow-up meeting about your development, ask how much budget is available for your personal development, make an list of which projects or roles within your organization stimulate your development and could be a good challenge for you (and ask your manager to do this as well), schedule an introductory interview with one or more coaches of your choice and tell them what you are struggling with, so that you can get advice on what will really help you and where you can experience the greatest growth for now.*

- Create a safe setting for these conversations. When you want to broach this topic, you can state what it means to you and what you expect from your conversational partner.

*Example: "I find it important but also difficult to talk about my own development, because it is very personal and it is about who I am, what I feel and where my insecurities lie. What I need from you is... (for example: that you are respectful, understanding and honest with me/ that this conversation stays between us/ that I am allowed to share and brainstorm freely for a while). Can we agree on that?"*

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# WHAT MAY THIS CONVERSATION BE ABOUT?

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Once you are ready to have the conversation, here are some topics you can bring up. The most important thing is to give the other person a glimpse into your inner world. You cannot just ask how the other person sees you without opening up about how you see yourself. How do you feel? What is your inner critic telling you that bothers you? What do you long for? What is your ambition? Reveal yourself!

Starting this conversation means that your leadership journey has already begun.



- Do you feel that I am adapting myself where it actually wouldn't be necessary? For example, do I magnify certain qualities of myself in a way that masks other qualities?
- Based on your own experiences with me, do you get the sense that I am revealing myself, also in my role as a leader? In what aspects do you notice that? Did you ever feel that I was hiding or withdrawing, whereas you felt I could have stepped forward?
- Do you see my feminine qualities reflected in how I lead? And my masculine qualities? What do you think I could show more of in my leadership?
- On the one hand, I am sometimes afraid of being seen as too ambitious, and on the other hand, I am sometimes afraid of being seen as too nice. I sometimes feel like I have to walk on eggshells to be taken seriously. What is your view of this? Can you see that this is sometimes difficult for me? What do you see happening to women in our organization when they are too much of one or the other?
- I am often described by you and others by my energetic, social qualities and less by my analytical and goal-oriented qualities. That's unfortunate – it's as if I'm not seen for being totally who I am when I do show both sides. It could be that this is because, as a woman with those former qualities, I conform more to the stereotype, making it easier for people to see me like that, plus they prefer to see me like that. What are your thoughts on this?
- What do you see when you look at leadership in our organization? What do you see happening to the ambition and potential of women in our organization? What do you think underlies that?
- For a long time, I have thought of the image of being "one of the guys" as something positive, but I now realize that I have been afraid of not fitting in, which has caused me to hide away my feminine side. Is this something you see in me? How would you describe my leadership style?
- For a long time, I have thought it was very important to be seen as friendly and helpful. But I now realize that I have been afraid of being seen as bossy, causing me to lower my sense of purpose and my own boundaries to the level of other people. Is this something you see in me? How would you describe my leadership style?
- I want to incorporate all my unique qualities into my leadership style. Will you help me to do that?

# BODY

- I notice that I do all my work based on logic and reason and do not include my emotional and intuitive intelligence in certain choices, even though I would like to do that more. I just don't think there is room for that at work. What are your thoughts on that?
- How do you view the development of my emotional competence? What do you think about my ability to deal with my feelings and desires in an appropriate and satisfying way? My thoughts on that are ...
- I usually feel/do not feel authentic at work. In your opinion, do I exude a certain authenticity in how I lead others?
- I think it is important to radiate what I believe in, do you think I am doing that? Is there congruence between what you sense about me, what you hear me say and what you see me do?
- I can feel like I am 'too much' and that I need to dim my energy and aura. The other day you/or someone else literally said to me .... What is meant by that?
- I think it's important as a leader to really stand out and positively influence and inspire my team. Do you see that ability in me? In terms of what I radiate, what do you receive back?
- I am bothered by sexual comments. Even if they are meant as a joke, they do affect me. Do you notice these comments? I would like you as my supervisor to set boundaries to others on or outside of this team.
- I struggle with and suffer from certain men/women with power in our organization. I want to feel more autonomous in my relationship with them.
- This is my experience with sexism in our organization ... (share what happened). What are your experiences with how men in this organization treat, look at, talk about women? What do you notice in our culture? How do you think this affects me?
- I feel insecure about who I am, whether I am good enough, what I radiate, what others think of me and about me. I don't want to feel like this as it consumes unnecessary energy which I would rather put into other things.
- I sometimes suffer from imposter syndrome and really think "what am I doing here?". I don't want to feel like this as it consumes unnecessary energy which I would rather put into other things.
- I think I need to undergo further substantive training before I can take the next step, but it could also be that I'm just insecure and that (further) training is not going to make a difference. What do you think I need in order to take the next step?

# SOUL

- I would like to pay attention to finding my unique contribution to this role and to the organization as opposed to just continuing in the same vein. I therefore need time and guidance to reflect on this and want to invest in it.
- I find it difficult to express myself when I have a different opinion to you/to .... How would you feel if I did express a differing opinion?
- I find it hard to express myself when it's not a popular opinion, though I think it's very important to do so. What do you think happens when I speak out .....? At those times that I do speak out, will you support me for bringing a different perspective, without having to agree with the content?
- When making difficult choices, I often lose sight of my own vision, standards and values. Then I let myself be led too much by the opinions of others. I would like to become stronger in acting in a way that is true to myself, even when under pressure. Would you like to challenge me on this?
- I have a clear vision for what I think the world/our organization needs. Can you help me to discover how I can incorporate that vision into my role here?
- I have a clear picture of my future. Would you like to help me to think through how I can develop in order to achieve that?

## FINALLY:

Conversations of this kind are not only about hearing your supervisor's perspective, but also about working with that perspective to decide how you can take the next step towards your personal growth and leadership development, based on your individual needs! Therefore, the answers to these questions give you something to focus your development on, plus something that the organization can focus on in its investment in you.

